

# **Knowledge Management**

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Knowledge Management has been a staple of private industry and IT consultants for several years, and January 5<sup>th</sup> may have officially marked its arrival in the Federal Government. Last June, GSA Administrator David Barram, appointed me as the first Chief Knowledge Officer of a Federal Agency. A few months later the Federal CIO Council asked me to start a government-wide working group on Knowledge Management. I knew there was growing interest in the field around government, but when the working group's first meeting came to order on January 5<sup>th</sup>, I was overwhelmed. More than 100 representatives from over 25 Federal organizations filled the conference room past its capacity. Knowledge Management was clearly moving from textbooks and magazine articles to the next step, actual implementation around government.

Knowledge Management's draw in the Federal Community is not totally unexpected. The government, like other organizations who have already embraced KM, offers its intellectual capital or knowledge, to its customers. Getting the right information to the right person at the right

time is the underlying mission of a huge percentage of government employees.

It was only a matter of time before we began to understand the value of employees, who not only bring knowledge to the job, but also share what they know with others; employees who continue the process of knowledge, growth and learning throughout their careers. We could actually reward employees for what they know and what they share with others.

Its tempting to see this as a fad, another short-term approach to management, but in truth KM simply incorporates and makes sense of many things we already know and accept. For instance, many of us are concerned about the graying of the government workforce. Our peers are growing older, in fact 50% of government employees will be eligible to retire by 2001. We also know that when they leave their experiences and knowledge will go with them. Companies like Caterpillar and organizations like the Social Security Administration are already looking at Knowledge Management strategies to acquire and collect that knowledge before it walks out the door.

Its no surprise then, that Knowledge Management positions are popping up in many agencies, and more are following the example of GSA,

Navy, and others by appointing Chief Knowledge Officers. At our first meeting, we heard from NASA CIO Lee Holcomb, the Office of Federal Procurement Policy's Deirdre Lee, and one of the leading private sector CIO's, AMS' Sue Hanley. The high level speakers and large crowd underscored the challenges we face as Knowledge Management's advocates in the Federal workplace.

We all understand that the intellectual capital or brainpower of our agencies, our government, and our country is what will make us successful in this new century, in fact a recent survey of Fortune 500 CEO's showed that knowledge management came in second as the top challenge facing companies --- just behind globalization. Yet, if its so well understood why do we even need a Knowledge Management working group?

There are several challenges to success, with the first being our underlying culture. As competitive people, many of us have a hard time sharing what we know. Knowledge is power and our society has traditionally fostered a hoarding mentality. Private Corporations have begun to counter this by rewarding those who share ideas, but this cultural barrier must be broken down. As government executives, we must also break down the organizational stovepipes and barriers that prevent our customers from finding a total solution quickly and easily.

When a customer and taxpayer goes to a government Web Site, everything from a passport application to a Census survey should be available regardless of time and geography. Our citizens expect no less and technology and knowledge management now make it possible.

We all understand that creating this kind of cultural change is daunting, but the good news is that many people around the government already get it and are working to spread the word.

At GSA, I'm working with ten pilot projects across the country where it could really make a difference. We're gaining much more acceptance and support than would have been possible with a top-down approach. Knowledge Management can't work as an edict from a Cabinet Secretary or top administrator, it will be resisted and ignored as a fad. On the other hand, applying it to real issues and developing a knowledge portal, like we're doing at GSA, lets employees actually use it, not just hear about it.

The governmentwide working group's goals and future meeting dates are on-line, check out the Federal Government's Knowledge Portal at [WWW.KM.gov](http://WWW.KM.gov)

Lew Platt of Hewlett Packard has said, “If we only knew what we know, we’d all be a lot smarter.” The Federal government knows more than we can imagine, and we are taking the first steps step in discovering what we know, using it, sharing it, and hopefully growing quite a bit smarter.